

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DHA-02 AID-05 EB-08 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGUI 1771

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, EAID, PFOR, CT
SUBJ: HUMAN RIGHTS AND FOREIGN ASSISTANCE (CAE)

REF: STATE 192576

1. OUR INFORMATION ABOUT NUMBER AND TREATMENT OF POLITICAL AND OTHER PRISONERS IN CAE IS SPOTTY AT BEST. THE DETENTION OF THE TWO JOURNALISTS, RANDAL AND GOLDSMITH, HAS PROVIDED US WITH A RARE GLIMPSE INTO A PORTION OF THE SYSTEM. THE SINGLE FACT WHICH COMES ACROSS MOST STRONGLY IS THE ARBITRARY AND CAPRICIOUS NATURE OF THAT SYSTEM. THE GENERAL PRACTICE SEEMS TO BE TO ARREST OR DETAIN PEOPLE FOR SOMETIMES EXTENDED PERIODS ON FLIMSY EVIDENCE, BUT ULTIMATELY TO RELEASE THEM, GOVERNMENT SERVANTS WHO ARE ARRESTED AND RELEASED ARE OFTEN REINSTATED IN THEIR OLD OR EQUAL JOBS. FEW ARE KILLED (THE ONLY ONES WE KNOW OF WERE THOSE ALLEGEDLY INVOLVED IN THE ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT OF FEBRUARY 1976) AND FEW ARE KEPT IN PRISON PERMANENTLY.

2. TREATMENT OF DETAINEES: JONATHAN RANDAL'S DESCRIPTION OF PRISON CONDITIONS IS REASONABLY ACCURATE. ALTHOUGH HE WAS IN THE EQUIVALENT OF A STATION-HOUSE JAIL, WE HAVE HEARD SIMILAR ACCOUNTS OF CONDITIONS IN THE CENTRAL PRISON AND AMONG POLITICAL DETAINEES. THERE ARE UNDOUBTEDLY OCCASIONAL BEATINGS. FAMILIES MUST
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SUPPLY FOOD. CONVICTED CRIMINALS ARE USED FOR FORCED LABOR (AND INDEED WE HAVE HEARD STORIES THAT THE NEED FOR LABOR IS SOMETIMES THE CAUSE FOR ARBITRARY ARRESTS).

3. LENGTH OF DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL: GOLDSMITH WAS DETAINED FOR A MONTH WITHOUT TRIAL OR OFFICIAL CHARGES, AND WE BELIEVE DETENTIONS OF SEVERAL MONTHS ARE PROBABLY COMMON.

4. NUMBER OF POLITICAL PRISONERS: WE HAVE NO IDEA HOW MANY "POLITICAL" PRISONERS THERE ARE. AS WE PREVIOUSLY REPORTED, THE JAILS WERE EMPTIED IN THE AMNESTY IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE PROCLAMATION OF THE EMPIRE DECEMBER 4, 1976. REPORTEDLY, FEW IF ANY POLITICAL PRISONERS WERE LEFT. THE JAILS ARE NOW AGAIN FULL. THE ONLY TRULY POLITICAL PRISONERS OF WHOM WE HAVE HEARD ARE THE MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF THE UNION GENERAL DE TRAVAILLEURS CENTRAFRICAINE, THE NATIONAL LABOR UNION. THEY WERE DETAINED IN MAY AND AS FAR AS WE KNOW STILL HAVE NOT BEEN RELEASED. THEIR CASES WOULD BE DEALT WITH, IF AT ALL, BY THE MILITARY TRIBUNAL. THAT TRIBUNAL ALSO HANDLES AMONG OTHER THINGS ALL CASES OF MAJOR THEFT FROM THE GOVERNMENT, WHICH WE WOULD NORMALLY CONSIDER TO BE NON-POLITICAL OFFENSES.

5. IT IS WIDELY ANTICIPATED THAT A GENERAL AMNESTY WILL AGAIN BE PROCLAIMED IN DECEMBER TO CELEBRATE THE EMPEROR'S CORONATION.
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